

LET US PRAY!

Today's Text: 2 Chronicles Chapter 6 - 2 Chron. 7: 1-12; Matt. 6: 5-15

Extract:

1. “*And he stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands: For Solomon had made a brazen scaffold...and had set it in the midst of the court; and upon it he stood and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven, and said...*” [2 Chron. 6: 12-13]
2. “*But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which is in secret shall reward thee openly. ... After this manner therefore pray ye...*” [Matt. 6: 6, 9]

In one household, the family members took turns to say the prayer before meals. Until the prayer had been said, no one dared to start eating. The practice had become so well established that the children, especially, looked forward to their turn. One day, it was the turn of the baby of the house, five-year old Rebecca, to lead the prayer. Her mother had taken great pains to teach her how to pray and that day was going to be her very first one. As soon as the dinner had been set, the telephone rang. It was a call for Mummy. She picked the receiver by the dining area. The discussion was getting too long for little Rebecca's comfort. Finally, her mother rejoined them, and Daddy invited Rebecca to say the grace. Without any hesitation, she said, “I am hungry; let's eat, Amen!”

Would you call that a prayer? To those who are used to certain ways of praying, the young child has not started at all. You did not hear Rebecca begin with “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” or, “In the name of Jesus.” But Rebecca had communicated her true feelings! She was precise. She was spontaneous. Or, would you have been happier to hear her say, “Give us this day our daily bread”?

Praying is the way that we can communicate with God. John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray. Jesus prayed so often that His disciples became impressed and asked Him to teach them how to also pray. That is the origin of the Lord's Prayer that we use in our worship [Lk 11: 1-4]. In today's lesson, we shall examine the subject as a continuation of last week's study on “Invite God into your worship!” [Vol. 5, No. 5: 8 February 2004]. We shall learn some principles from Solomon's prayer during the dedication service with which we can improve our prayer lives for better results.

1. The dignitary has arrived!

Last week, we saw what happened when Solomon and his people had *properly* invited God into their worship:

It came to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever; that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God [2 Chron. 6: 13-14]

It was at that stage that Solomon stood up to lead the congregation in prayer. However, before we go into that, let us make the setting as realistic to our modern situation as possible. After all, Jesus used simple things around Him to teach the people about the kingdom of God [e.g., **Matt. 25: 1-30**].

The dignitary that we have been expecting has arrived and is sitting beside our Head of State or the mayor/chief/king of our town. There is electricity in the air! Musicians and dancers perform as if they have taken performance-enhancing drugs! Heaps of gifts, the precious products of the local community, begin to form a mini mountain range in front of the visitor. Finally, a formal welcome address is read. An important first part of the address is actually not written down. It is called *Protocols*. It is here that the dignitary and his entourage are eulogized. We are all familiar with “Your Excellencies, My Lords Spiritual and Temporal, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen!” If you skip the protocols, you are regarded as rude, if not crude!

There are interesting parallels in the Bible. For example, Daniel addressed Darius the Median king of Babylon as “O king, *live for ever*” [**Dan. 6: 21**]. Of course, that is a hyperbole (an overstatement)! Physically speaking, no mortal being can live forever! Daniel was only singing the praises of the king. In another example, Tertullus, the orator hired by the Jewish leaders to prosecute the case against Paul before Felix the governor, began as follows, “Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness” [**Acts 24: 1-3**]. Of course, Tertullus himself knew that he was lying but he needed to massage the governor’s ego to favour his own point of view!

Why do we involve in this kind of obvious rigmarole (i.e., going round about the main issues)? It is to prepare the ground for our requests. We need to arrest the favourable attention of the dignitary who can grant our requests that will be presented later. Interestingly, God also loves us to glorify His name. In the first four of the Ten Commandments, He made it clear that He is the only God to be

worshipped and served and that He will not share limelight with anyone else [**Ex. 20: 1-11**]. In John’s vision of heaven, we saw that worshippers in heaven fell down before God, saying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” [**Rev. 4: 11**]. Jesus stood still when blind Bartimaeus addressed Him as “Jesus, Thou son of David” [**Lk 18: 38, 40**], His messianic name [**Lk 1: 32**].

Just as the Welcome Address to a human dignitary consists of gifts, a warm reception, praises and requests, prayers to God are more than asking for favours from Him. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them *how to pray*, He replied, “*after this manner therefore pray ye*” [**Matt. 6: 9**]. In other words, the components of a prayer can be found in the Lord’s Prayer. As we can see in the chart below, prayer consists of *adoration and submission to God’s will, forgiveness, protection from Satan and evil forces and earthly needs*. Solomon’s dedication prayer conformed with that pattern to a large extent.

ANALYSIS OF THE LORD’S PRAYER [Matt. 6: 9-13]					
	Adoration	Submission to God’s Dominion & Authority	Physical Needs	Forgiveness	Protection from Satan and evil forces
1. Our Father who art in Heaven	X				
2. Hallowed be Thy name	X				
3. Thy Kingdom come		X			
4. Thy will be done in earth as it is in Heaven		X			
5. Give us this day our daily bread			X		
6. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us				X	
7. And lead us not into temptation					X
8. But deliver us from all evil					X
9. For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory forever and ever. Amen	X				

2. Solomon prays!

By the cloud that had filled the temple to such an extent that the priests could not stand [**2 Chron. 5: 13-14**], the presence and glory of God (*Shekinah*) had been

demonstrated. The heavenly dignitary had arrived. Solomon as the king was His chief host. As Solomon stood to “read” the “Welcome Address,” all the people stood [**2 Chron. 6: 1-2**]. Let us follow the sequence of events from that point:

a) *The greetings [vv. 1-11]*

Solomon began by saluting the covenant-fulfilling God, who had brought the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt [**v. 5**], and chosen Jerusalem as His eternal city and David as king [**v. 6**]. Moreover, He had now given Solomon, David’s son, the grace to build the Lord’s house, into which the Ark of the Covenant had been permanently installed [**vv. 7-11**].

b) *Solomon assumes postures of submission and respect*

As Solomon got ready to pray, he changed his posture. From a *standing* position, he went on his *knees* before the congregation, and *spread out his hands* toward heaven [**vv. 12-13**]. Remember that Solomon was in the presence of God. Therefore, whatever he was doing at the time was *spontaneous*. It was a mark of honour and respect to God and submission to His authority.

In the Bible, pray-ers assumed different praying postures *as they were moved*. For example, after receiving from Nathan God’s promises for David and his descendants, the king was so overwhelmed that he went into God’s presence and simply *sat* down! He prayed in that posture. In His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus *fell on his face* to pray [**Matt. 26: 39**]. Therefore, whatever praying posture you use, apart from what your church prescribes, should be spontaneous if in deed you are in the presence of God. The likelihood is that you will fall flat on your face like the priests who “could not stand by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God” [**2 Chron. 5: 14**].

c) *Solomon’s words confirm adoration and total submission to God’s dominion and authority*

Solomon acknowledged that the Lord is Almighty and incomparable [**2 Chron. 6: 14**], who cannot be contained by any human dwelling [**18**]. Therefore, the house being dedicated was not meant to be His dwelling place like His throne in heaven but to serve as “the place whereof Thou hast said that Thou wouldest put Thy name there, to hearken unto the prayer which Thy servant prayeth toward this place” [**vv. 19-20, 40-42**]. That prayer is analogous to what Jesus taught His disciples when He said, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

When we praise and glorify God and put ourselves under His authority and dominion, we are drawing His attention to our requests that would

soon follow. We are telling Him that we cannot help ourselves, that no earthly power can do it for us. Jehosaphat said a similar thing in the following words, “We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee” [2 Chron. 20: 12].

d) *Solomon asks for forgiveness*

Solomon admitted to God, “There is no man which sinneth not” [2 Chron. 6: 36]. He then went on to confess his and his people’s sins against God [v. 21] and their neighbours [v. 22], and asked for forgiveness [v. 25].

It is a well-established spiritual principle that God only hears the prayers of the righteous, that is, those who have confessed their sins [1 Jn 1: 8-9; Prov. 15: 29]. We must *never forget* that.

e) *Solomon seeks for protection against Satanic forces that impact on the people’s physical needs and spiritual well being*

The people had enemies in the form of war [vv. 24-25], drought [v. 26], and pestilence [v. 28], and economic and health hazards [v. 29] for which they needed God’s protection against Satanic forces. Solomon also prayed that the same grace be extended to strangers in their midst [v. 32]. Finally, Solomon asked for the wellness of the soul, that the people “may fear Thee, to walk in thy ways, *as long as they live*” [v. 31].

On the subject of whom to pray for, Paul exhorts believers that “first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for *all men, for kings and for all that are in authority*” [1 Tim. 2: 1-2]. The circumstances at the time of praying should suggest to us those that we should also pray for.

f) *God replies to Solomon’s prayer “address”!*

We are told, “Now, when Solomon had made an end of praying, the *fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house*” [2 Chron. 7: 1]. The priests could not enter the house because of the presence and glory of God. When the people saw that, they fell on their faces “to the ground upon the pavement and worshipped and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever” [vv. 2-3]. Later that night, God appeared to Solomon in his sleep and told him, “I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to Myself for an house of sacrifice” [v. 12]

Isn’t that wonderful? How many of us are patient enough to await God’s response after praying? Jehosaphat heard from God on the spot before he

and his people left the temple [**2 Chron. 20: 14-17**]. How do you know what to do next if He has not given you His position on your request? After all, our earthly dignitary will not leave without responding to our Welcome Address!

g) *The congregation offers thanks*

In *appreciation* of God's presence and acceptance of their prayer, the people offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep [**2 Chron. 7: 5**! Many of us would receive and run off like a dog that has stolen the butcher's bone! For God, thanksgiving is an important part of our sacrifice [**Ps. 50: 12-15**].

3. Conclusion

Praying measures the state of your relationship with God. If prayer means communication with Him, then, you need to *reach Him as often as possible*. That is why we are told to pray without ceasing, which is part of the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you [**1 Thes. 5: 17-18**]. How can this be practised?

Since the believer's body is the temple of the living God [**2 Cor. 6: 16**], you do not need to go to the mountain like Moses or to the Jerusalem temple like Solomon to pray to God. Wherever you find yourself, God is present within you. Therefore, when you wake up each morning, God is the first person to greet. That is followed by your morning devotion and Bible study. Over breakfast, you thank Him for the food and the appetite, the same as you should do over lunch and dinner. Before you leave the house for work, school or business, you pray to keep the house and the day in His care. As you get into your car or the bus or the train (or your regular means of transport), you pray for journey mercies. As you get to your office or school or business, you thank Him for still finding the place intact. You ask for His wisdom, knowledge and understanding to make a successful day. As you make important decisions during the day, you seek His guidance. At the end of the day, you pray to place your office in His care, to rebuke fire or theft, etc. Again, in the car, boat, bus, plane or train, you ask for journey mercies back home. On arrival, you thank Him that you had a home to return to. On going to bed, you commit your body into his care and ask Him to speak to you in your dreams.

By the time you do this everyday, you may no longer need a specific time or place or posture for prayers because you are perpetually praying. You will come to appreciate what Jesus means when He asked us to pray to His Father in secret who will reward us openly [**Matt. 6: 6-9**].

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